

March 17, 1976

Dr. Kendall W. King
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Dear Dr. King,

Thank you for your letter of March 11th. David Werner may be the closest thing to a saint (I say this without irony) in contemporary times. This does not mean that he is especially trained in the public health analysis nor that he is always sufficiently articulate even about the things he knows and understands. I am sure he would welcome your critical comment with respect to the role of nutrition education in Donde No Hay Doctor. I know that in his own work in Mexico he has learned a good bit about the importance of the nutritional base and has done some few things about it, particularly with respect to helping the local peasants diversify the crops that they grow for home consumption. Maybe he felt that his doctor book was not quite the place for this information but I suspect he could be persuaded otherwise.

In fact, when Werner first started his work, he had a much narrower perspective still. He felt he would be able to bring some elementary but still desirable Western medicine to the good people of the Mexican villages, and it was only after several years of practical experience that he came to realize many of the larger dimensions of his problem. He may still not yet be sufficiently over the doctor kick to understand public health in its larger dimensions, but I think if you were to meet him and talk to him you would find him more broad minded than his writings indicate. I am not sure he is going to make as good a public health investigator and rapporteur as he is in his primary mission, but I would hardly want to discourage him from following his own lights in the wake of his excellent experience so far. What would be best of all, would of course be some arrangement whereby he could team up with others who had a better developed analytical education and insight to which he could offer I think some important complements.

I have been trying to do a little of that since many of his followers appear as students in my course on health. It is a little discouraging in a sense because these youngsters are so idealistic and feel that there is so much that they can offer without more profound analysis that I sometimes even question myself about how far to push that. But you may be sure that

the kind of question you are raising is one that we have brought up among ourselves and it will certainly do no harm to press the matter even more strongly.

By coincidence one of the students in my class this year had spent a summer working on that mother craft project in Haiti, so I had a sense of deja vu in reading your report. She did not reflect the philosophy of capitulation - perhaps she is just a bit young to want to accept all of the realities of life!

One of the things that did come through from her presentation is the very great difficulty of setting up persuasively controlled comparisons in attempts to evaluate the outcomes. She did present some data but the two villages in question were so obviously different in other parameters that it was very difficult to assess and evaluate the actual long-term followthrough and residue of the mother craft effort. But I must say I have again a rather similar reaction of wading whether I am just quibbling about rarified, academic and non-capitulative issues.

I would certainly enjoy being able to discuss some of these questions with you closer to hand. I wonder if you are ever going to be out this way or perhaps vice versa. I spent a couple of weeks in December at WHO trying to get a better view of their overall operation, primarily as concerned health research - and I found it rather frustrating to try to penetrate that kind of bureaucracy. This is no criticism of Mahler, considering the constraints under which he must operate but I wonder if he could not be a bit more energetic than he is in trying to unshackle himself from the whims of the assembly. Certainly Candau was less troubled about it. I read that PAHO just went through some administrative trimming and particularly with respect to their role of the layer called the Assistant Director General at WHO. I wonder whether something similar might not be in order at Geneva. That may be very non-capitulative in the light of the existing political circumstances.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr